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MANIFESTO for a model mayor

A 2012 London Mayoral Manifesto
By Dave Hill and Guardian readers



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THANK YOU

Unusually for a proposer of a political programme, I won't be running for office and, in fact, do not exist. I am, though, entirely human and offer this manifesto as a considered, passionate and hopefully persuasive contribution to the debate about the leadership of London, as its six million electors are invited to consider which real candidate they wish to install as mayor for the next four years.

Who am I? Think of me, perhaps, as a composite of arguments and ideas drawn from a range of existing policy proposals, thinktanks, academics, research findings, campaign groups and, most of all, readers of the Guardian website who, over a two-week period, contributed to a collective vision for a better London and suggested ways in which it might be realised.

Each online debate was initially framed in an article by the Guardian's London blogger and commentator Dave Hill, and it is he who has compiled this document. But the manifesto is the work of hundreds of people whose expertise, experience and insights suffuse every paragraph. It is the product of an exercise in "open journalism", with an extended crowdsourcing project at its core.

You will not be able to vote for me on 3 May, but I hope that you will go the polling station wishing you could.

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London is known throughout the world as a great city. It is admired for its magnitude, revered for its history and adored for its vitality. From the heart of the City to the soul of the suburbs, London's evolution as a place to live and work is a story of unending enterprise and creativity. For centuries it has drawn wealth and labour to it from all over the country and the globe. To be a Londoner can be to feel part of an unfolding miracle of human endeavour. If elected London's mayor, I will strive to keep it that way.

And yet London's triumphs can also be its failings. The approaching election coincides with the build up to the London 2012 Olympics. When London was awarded the Games it seemed to crown a continuing tale of triumphant growth. Yet in 2011, as the recession bit, the London riots lifted in the lid on another side of the capital's life. The world still hears London calling, but part of the city is falling too.

The riots were ugly, pitiless and frightening. They also revealed, to those who wished to see, that too many Londoners are taking little part in their city's headline story of opportunity and prosperity. Only a few of them expressed that disconnection through burning, looting and confrontation. Most are honest, blameless and respectable. They are quieter, and therefore mostly ignored: the hundreds of thousands of households in poor and overcrowded homes; the one in six paid less than the London Living Wage pay; the one in 10 unemployed. There is a golden London and there is a struggling one.

My defining pledge as your candidate for mayor is to bring those two Londons closer together.

The future of them both depends on it.

No mayor can accomplish this alone. The job is often mocked for being big on profile but low on power. Whoever wins will receive much attention and a fine view of Tower Bridge, but only limited levers for running the city. Yet that attention is a platform from which to exert influence, and the use of those levers can have significant effects.

My top priorities would be:

- **Modernising London's economy and transforming its transport network so that the whole metropolis works much better.**
- **Strengthening London's neighbourhoods to make the city and its suburbs better places to live.**
- **Building London's unity and fighting disaffection.**

These goals are not separate from each other. Rather, they are complementary parts of the same vision for a metropolis that would

become more productive, more efficient, more harmonious and more healthy and wealthy too.

Modernising London's economy means helping consolidate the parts that are successful, while encouraging others to take root and grow - not just in the centre of London but across the city. For all its recent failings, the financial sector has not ceased to be a vital generator of jobs. But London's economy also needs to diversify, both in terms of the sorts of industries it contains and where they are located.

We cannot achieve that goal without transforming the way we travel around the city. London's public transport services are quite magnificent, but its fares too high. Our roads, meanwhile, are clogged by congestion with no prospect of improvement. The time lost through long, slow journeys is a massive drain on London's people, its employers and its quality of life. As mayor I would not tolerate such waste.

Neighbourhood life in London would be nourished by the economic and transportation changes I want to see: the daily commute is a huge drain on people's time, pockets and energy; nurturing more employment in outer London areas would help more Londoners work closer to their homes.

The greatest single challenge facing community life in London is its profound and corrosive housing crisis. Soaring prices, rising rents and lengthening waiting lists are the just the most painful symptoms of this. As mayor I would use every statute, trick and ounce of influence at my disposal to increase and improve the supply of homes that ordinary people can afford.

I would also strive to combine bold London-wide strategies with a radical localist agenda, working in partnership with London's boroughs to devolve more power over street management, public spaces and policing to community level.

All the measures outlined above would contribute to reducing the disaffection of far too many of the capital's people.

The immersion of increasing numbers of young people in a world of territorial feuds and extreme violence is the bleakest expression of this. As mayor I would bring renewed vigour and focus to the task of mobilising police, youth workers, employers and schools in a great, combined effort to turn this destructive trend around.

Pursuing the goals described above would be the core mission of my mayoralty. But I would also seek to change the nature of the job of the London mayor and improve the way it's done.

I would argue that London should be given greater freedom to run its own affairs. The mayor has recently been provided with more

direct powers over housing, regeneration and policing, but he's also been given less money with which to make use of them. The capital's economy - and that of the United Kingdom as a whole - would benefit from London's becoming more financially self-sustaining.

Compared to New York City, with which it has much in common, London is pitifully dependent on central government for grants to pay for its transport, development and policing. As mayor, I would argue that City Hall should be given far greater local tax-raising powers, allowing it to spend more accordance with its needs.

As mayor I would communicate with candour and transparency. I would hold an open press conference on a set day of each week, lasting for one hour or until journalists had run out of questions. At least half of the conferences would take place at locations around the city. All would be available as podcasts and be webcast live wherever possible.

I would write a weekly column about London affairs on the City Hall website, which London's newspapers and websites would be free to republish in return for donating their standard fee to the Museum of London, perhaps to contribute to a London history project benefiting London's schools.

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London is a kaleidoscopic capitalist metropolis that attracts investment and humankind accordingly, just as it has done since the Romans founded Londinium. This is a precious asset that must be cherished. Doing so means recognising that transformations are required in every major component of our economic machine: from the types and locations of our industries, to our transport and communications infrastructure, to the squandering of human resources represented by unemployment.

What we can learn from London's most recent traumas - the financial crisis, the recession and the riots - is that London's economy needs to become more resilient, more efficient and more varied.

There is, of course, a limit to the mayor's ability to affect international market forces. But City Hall has recently been given more direct control over economic development and directing regeneration. There will be less money to spend than before, but the new arrangements, combined with existing powers over transport, provide me with some scope to implement my economic and transport priorities - in short, to make London work better in every way.

That means:

- Diversifying and decentralising London's industries while supporting those that serve it well.
- Targeting regeneration at areas that need it most, including outer London town centres.
- Campaigning for a major, genuinely affordable house-building programme to drive recovery.
- Transforming our road network with a London-wide pay-as-you-go congestion charge.
- Building a mass culture of cycling and walking.
- Reducing public transport fares and the strain on bus and tube capacity.
- Fighting against a low pay and low skills future.

Supporting industry

London has some first-class and fast-growing industries, and my mayoralty would help to keep them that way. Though I favour better regulation of the financial service sector and tackling its labyrinthine international tax avoidance schemes, there would be no cheap banker bashing from my mayoralty. The Square Mile and London's other core business districts remain key to employment in the capital.

Our city also excels in medical research, higher education, legal services, media, shopping, tourism and culture but it needs to build these still further.

I welcome the coming establishment of the Francis Crick Centre - originally known as the UK Centre for Medical Research Innovation - in the Camden, north London, and urge the charities and London universities involved to forge links with London schools to encourage students to take an interest in science and recognise the growing job prospects in this field.

London's media sector is changing, with its traditional newspaper industry shrinking and the BBC, though still a large London employer, having moved much of its operation to Manchester. However, new media industries are flourishing in the capital, including related digital technology firms clustered around Old Street roundabout. Soho and its environs remain the centre of London's film and television post-production industry. As mayor I would champion such innovation.

There is support for "incubators" along the lines of CompeteFor, which has helped small London firms benefit from the Olympics, and City University's start-up advisory unit. London is also full of more traditional small businesses that would benefit from other types of help, all of which as mayor I would lobby for.

Many seeking to expand find that dealing with commercial landlords is complex, costly and sometimes disastrous. Business rates raised on premises are often cited as a burden on small firms. One suggestion from the sector is that this levy could be suspended for a period in return for the company taking on a young person who has been unemployed for, say, six months. Local credit unions have been suggested as a better source of borrowing.

I want London-based banks to do far more to support London's small- and medium-sized enterprises, and would send them a big signal by depositing the £14bn annual budget of the Greater London Authority with the banks that have the best record for lending to them. Organisations within the GLA would be required to procure more of its services from such firms, thereby encouraging and supporting the innovation London needs. A modest first target would be 10%.

London is a lynchpin of global trade and a magnet for overseas students and visitors, the latter doing much to keep our theatres and restaurants thriving despite the recession. Yet for a proud "world city" we can be surprisingly shy and unwelcoming.

I would heed calls to reverse recent cuts to City Hall's promotional budgets, and also seek the support of London's larger businesses in

revamping mayoral offices in countries whose emerging economies are growing fast, such as India, China and Brazil. These have won the business community's approval in the past and I would want its help with cementing those global links.

London should also seek out cities and regions around the world with economies that are complementary to London's, with a view to building long-term relationships. The relevant government bodies should be enlisted to help with that task.

The government's annual cap on the number of non-European Union citizens allowed to enter the country is a crude, populist move that keeps few people out while at the same time capturing some who have much to contribute. At the very least the cap should be set at a higher level. Foreign students in Britain temporarily should no longer be classified as permanent migrants and therefore captured by the cap.

Our tourist visa system and Border Force operations must become more efficient, so that only the illegal are discouraged. London's hospitality should be exemplary in every way. Our hotels should be welcoming, our restaurants beguiling, our parks neat, our streets clean and our burgeoning night-time economy as safe and well-policed as it is lively.

All of that is for the good of Londoners as well as its visitors, including those from other parts of Britain. London has always been at its best when at its most open.

Yet although we must build on our established strengths, that alone cannot solve our problems.

It's hard to exaggerate the growing problems we now face. At present, 10% of working-age Londoners are jobless including, disastrously, nearly a quarter of its 16- to 24-year-olds. We have an unemployment catastrophe on our hands that shows few signs of going away.

London's high cost of living is hurting more and more people who are in work, in particular because of the huge hole made in their incomes by the price of accommodation. A recent survey suggested that 30% of Londoners expect to have to move elsewhere because of housing costs.

The ability of London businesses to attract and retain employees on low and middle incomes is diminishing because fewer and fewer of them can afford to live within reasonable travelling distance or in London at all. At the same time, available land is standing unused while the construction industry remains in the doldrums.

We need urgently to add to the list of things that we do well, and do more to bring

opportunities and people together. That is what I mean by modernising London's economy, and that is the challenge I would address as London's mayor.

Targeting regeneration

City economies work best when people live close to their places of work, and when places of work that help each other thrive are located close together. Proximity to work reduces the cost in time and resources expended on travelling. Proximity of complementary businesses reinforces the vitality of them all, and encourages more businesses to form. These combinations are enhanced by sympathetic infrastructure, such as attractive high streets, natural features and, of course, suitable homes to live in.

This is the blend of factors I would use my planning and regeneration powers to help promote, closely following the lead set by the planners of the post-Games Olympic Park. I would concentrate my efforts on two sorts of London area: the poorest parts of inner London and the primary outer London town centres.

This emphasis would entail a big switch in the emphasis of spatial development policy. It would mean focusing on the linked, long-term objectives of greater efficiency, more employment and an improved environment - rather than enabling wealthy boroughs and property developers to exploit high land values and in the process price whole districts out of the reach of all but the richest. You do not make places better by destroying them. You do it by shaping changes that enhance what is already there, primarily for the benefit of those living there.

I would amend the present London Plan to reflect this policy, reviewing the areas presently designated prime sites for intensified or wholesale redevelopment, and assigning them new designations reflecting a hierarchy in tune with both local and wider London needs.

I would use my powers to refuse or take over major planning applications initially determined at borough level, to impede developments that would obliterate existing neighbourhoods or impose new ones on people against their will.

I would instead seek to facilitate combinations of private and public investment that creatively address individual localities' problems, build their strengths and in so doing facilitate the spread of growth and opportunity more widely and evenly across the capital.

My regeneration strategy for areas where disaffection and unemployment are high would involve co-operating with the boroughs concerned to revive the area's social fabric

rather than only refashion it. Gentrification, driven by property values, can create jobs, brighten shopping streets, draw spending power and adjust an area's social mix to the benefit of local schools and public spaces. But it can also price poorer people out and raise the cost of living, making them victims rather than beneficiaries of change.

I would urge the boroughs concerned to make the provision of genuinely affordable housing and any possible revival of London's diminished manufacturing base the key principles of their local development strategies, and do all I could to support them.

Smarter restaurants and shops and new homes for market sale can be valuable parts of the regeneration mix and, in the real world, will almost inevitably feature. But my objectives would be to halt the incremental clearance of the poor and the low-paid from inner London rather than hastening it, and to fight poverty instead of displacing it.

Other tools at my disposal include the creation of enterprise zones, in negotiation with the government, where businesses benefit from reduced rates, and the setting up of mayoral development corporations where similar incentives are available and planning powers accrue to the mayor. I would fight for as many parts of London struggling with joblessness and poverty as possible to receive help of this kind.

The desirability of accelerated growth in outer London is illustrated by the fact that it contains 60% of London's population but it provides only 40% of London's jobs. Moreover, 40% of outer Londoners work somewhere else. Outer London job growth has been completely outstripped by that in both central London and the surrounding Home Counties.

Outer London is by no means a uniform place and those figures conceal a lot of variations. Nonetheless, the phenomenon of the dormitory suburb is both real and in many ways unhelpful. Moreover, parts of outer London contain untapped potential for greatly increased economic activity and human settlement, which I would try to see fulfilled.

A report by the Outer London Commission for the current mayor on how outer London could contribute more to London's economy found against a proposal for four "super hubs", each positioned roughly in each quadrant around the capital's rim. Instead, the report concluded that making the most of established town centres would be more realistic.

There is room for development and increased housing density in many parts of outer London without wrecking the essence of suburban areas. Greater density need not

make a place less appealing. Each hectare of desirable Kensington and Chelsea has 142 people living in it. The outer London average is 38. London's population is expected to increase to nine million by 2030, and those people will have to live somewhere.

More and larger buildings seem inevitable, yet if this trend is resisted in outer London, it would bring advantages. The possibility arises of outlying town centres becoming more prosperous, innovative and self-sufficient, with its people less dependent on central London for entertainment, consumption and work.

The Outer London Commission identified office-based work, leisure, tourism and culture, retail, and green and creative "knowledge-based" industries, including green technologies. It said that these latter raised questions about outer London's information and communications technology, and how this might be improved by locally based business support services and better wifi networks.

The thrust of my approach to helping outer London would be help expedite growth in the ways the report recommends, by ensuring that my backing for small businesses of all kinds embraced Sutton, Romford, Hounslow and Enfield as closely as everywhere else, and by bringing the long-floated idea of a London-wide, high speed broadband network to fruition.

The aim would be to secure the seed money required to establish such a network, emulating the achievement of South Korea. Established suppliers would be invited to tender for one of the most prestigious wifi projects in the world - turning London into one giant hotspot - and other businesses urged to contribute to the cost, given that they would gain so much from this communication revolution.

Outer London's connectivity can be improved in other ways: through forms of transport investment. A recent pilot for an orbital bus route linking suburban town centres was unsuccessful, but I would ask Transport for London to explore the feasibility of more ambitious options, including light rail and looking again at extending or expanding tram services.

I would also increase the funds available for boroughs to emulate the successful Smarter Travel Sutton scheme, which greatly increased cycling, walking and public transport use and persuaded people out of their cars. Economic growth in outer London would have to be accompanied by a range of measures to prevent a damaging, counter-productive growth in traffic congestion.

It would also go hand in hand with major

house-building programmes, and have to. Low projections of job demand have been a disincentive to both public and private investment. Why create jobs when not enough people seem to need them? But London has a desperate need for more homes that its fast-growing population can afford to live in.

Land in outer London is both cheaper than further in, and in some parts plentiful. The co-ordinated provision of housing, commercial space, the right sorts of transport options, and business tech and infrastructure in and around the outlying boroughs' town centres would give them a big boost, and make a big contribution to modernising the way London works as a whole.

But more homes that ordinary Londoners can afford are needed city-wide. Supplying them in the numbers required would of itself make a massive contribution to the capital's economic vitality. That is the subject I'll turn to next.

Affordable homes

One of my first acts as mayor would be to set up a City Hall directorate called Homes for London.

The reasons for the housing crisis are various. The sell-off of council houses in the 1980s has vastly diminished the number available to people on low and middle incomes, obliging many to rent in the private sector where more and more depend on housing benefit to pay their landlords, even if they're in work - a ruinous false economy. A market price bubble has inflated to an insane size, thanks largely to speculators driving prices up and a lack of supply of new homes to meet demand.

All over London, pieces of land remain undeveloped because investors are waiting for a better time to maximise profits. Throughout the metropolis houses stand rotting because their owners can't or won't make them fit for habitation or because they've simply forgotten they exist. It's a scandalous waste of opportunities to build and to refurbish, and in the process make a hole in London's tragic unemployment count.

As mayor, what could I do? The brutal truth is that my ability to end this disgrace would be quite modest. Government funding for affordable homes has been slashed, and access to it made dependent on generating a greater percentage of homes at the top end of the "affordable" range, putting them beyond the reach of many who need them without the help of benefits.

My approach through Homes for London would be a combination of relentless lobbying of central government and using maximum ingenuity in finding non-government sources

of finance for genuinely affordable homes.

There is a powerful case for hugely increasing public investment in affordable housing in London, and part of that is the reward that would accrue to London's economy and the taxpayer. It would create jobs, encourage more private investment in market homes, enable London to better accommodate the low- and middle-income earners essential to its economy, and reduce the health, educational and other social costs that bad housing facilitates.

I would make this case tirelessly, because the future of London depends on it. In addition I would argue for taxation and property rights reforms that would penalise speculators for squandering land and property.

I am attracted by arguments for introducing a land value tax on the owners of sites left vacant and homes allowed to rot. Landowners who hoard to make big killings in the future would receive a big tax bill. The money would be given to Homes For London for investment in new homes. Should the owner be offshore, the state would take the land in lieu of a cheque. London ought to be a city that rewards enterprise not exploitation.

I would also urge boroughs to maximise use of their Housing Act powers, to compulsorily purchase homes whose owners ignore requests to put them to use. It is sickening that the City of Westminster alone contains about 3,000 empty homes, some of them worth £50m even in a state of decay.

Another huge priority would be matching the vast bank of London public sector land, much of it owned by Greater London Authority group members, with house builders. Little progress has been made on this in recent years, despite promises to do so. New funding models worth exploring include tax increment financing, creating a London housing bond and supporting the direct development of land owned by boroughs, so that building can begin as soon as possible.

The present London Plan says the capital needs more than 33,000 additional homes each year. Getting near that target at all, let alone ensuring most are within reach of the average Londoner, will be a massive task. But if I fail to make large strides towards completing it, that will not be through any lack of commitment.

The contribution of home building to London's economic strength is only one part of why it matters, and I'll return to the subject later in this manifesto.

Transforming roads

Reforming London's transport systems would be central to my modernising programme for

the capital's economy - including reducing the need for people to travel around the capital at all. My objective would be to harmonise the goals of prosperity and quality of life. A good start would be to count out loud the money that is wasted as a result of our road management status quo.

Massive sums are sloshed into the gutter of unprofitability as a consequence of traffic congestion. Transport for London puts the loss as £2bn a year - a figure that dwarfs the £48m estimated to be lost each time there's a strike on the London Underground.

There are huge health costs from motor vehicle use too. A report for the current mayor estimated that 4,300 people a year die prematurely due to pollution. We have been far too reluctant to deal with the issue, delaying the progressive implementation of the low emission zone, fiddling just enough around the edges to avoid being hit with European Commission fines. As well as extracting a cost in human misery, pollution-related sickness in London robs its economy and the exchequer.

This cascade of lost wealth and health is projected to get worse. Adjustments to traffic lights and schemes to limit the disruption caused by roadworks can help, but will never hold back the congestion tide. Everybody knows this. Everybody knows it is bad news. Most politicians are looking the other way. I would look the issue in the eye.

I would run a six-month trial of a completely new congestion charging scheme across the entire Greater London area, using a new pay-as-you-go road-pricing system with the best modern technology, and experimenting with differential tariffs for different sorts of vehicle and different times of day. Our legendary black cab drivers would be exempt from the charge - as would approved private hire vehicles - and, of course, our red London buses. So would motorcycles and electric cars, whose wider use I would favour.

At the end of the trial period I would hold a referendum on retaining the scheme, as Stockholm did with its scheme six years ago. I would campaign passionately in favour. If Londoners voted "yes", the system would be made permanent. If "no" I would accept the result, but try to persuade them they were mistaken.

This innovation, working smoothly, would bring about a revolution in the capital's transport system, and with it a transformation in its capacity to do business and its citizens' chances of living well.

A recent academic study has cautiously calculated that £1bn or more a year could accumulate in the mayoral bank account. I would ringfence a large part, if not all, of this

sum for improvements to the management of London's streets, including fixing potted surfaces and redesigning nightmare junctions. If motorists are to be asked to pay more, they should enjoy some reward.

I would also require the police to enforce the rules of the road more strictly, including catching more uninsured drivers. TfL has found the single biggest cause of congestion to be road traffic accidents. We need safer driving in our city and I would promote that too.

I do not underestimate the problems of persuading Londoners to accept the idea of paying a further tax to use the roads. Transport for London figures show that traffic volumes in London have been in decline for 10 years, but also that a hefty 35% of journey stages in the capital are still taken by car - more than bus, tram and London Underground combined.

Car use is greatest in outer London, where public transport alternatives often aren't ideal. The capital's road network has remained as important for freight transportation as it was 20 years ago. Plumbers, builders and carpet fitters can't ply their trade by bus. For all the alternative ways of getting around town, the car remains a popular choice, and for some the only option.

For all these reasons I am not bent on prosecuting some covert war on cars. With less traffic clogging the capital overall, I would support the building of a new road bridge between Beckton and Thamesmead, enabling easier access to and between the gateway boroughs (a far better option than a new tunnel close to the existing Blackwall tunnel, which is a recipe for gridlock). This would undoubtedly encourage road traffic into the parts of town it served, but my road-pricing scheme would lessen any bad effects on congestion.

I hope most would conclude that paying a small, road-users "fare" in return for shorter, more reliable journey times and better roads would represent a good deal. It would certainly be a good deal for London as a whole.

Other road management measures I'd investigate would be the feasibility of removing race-track gyratory systems, increasing the amount of night-time freight deliveries, and other attempts to reduce the amount of heavy goods vehicle traffic in central London during daytime. I would take a strong lead on the latter, learning from the consolidated waste removal arrangement developed for Regent Street by the Crown Estate, and other ideas such as "last mile" delivery logistics using electric vehicles.

Finally, I would want to do more to recruit London's black cab drivers to the modernising cause. Many would like to see a new London taxi board, in which all the different associations and unions representing

drivers were included. Their demands include rickshaws being banned from the roads and confined to the parks, more official ranks outside entertainment venues and bars, and a much stronger clampdown on illegal touting by unlicensed cabs especially late at night. I would listen sympathetically.

In return I would hope for their vocal support in badgering the government to remove VAT from the price of the new, cleaner, greener Euro 5-standard cab. Critics of the status quo would like to see fewer taxis queuing beyond existing ranks and more pedestrianisation of narrow streets in Soho and the City. The complaint is that these are used as taxi rat runs.

A new settlement is required with drivers of London's black cabs, one of its most resonant international emblems. I would be eager to reach it. No journey to modernising London's economy would be complete if they were not a part of it.

Cycling revolution

I would deliver a further progression in London road management, in the form of radical moves to make London friendlier to cyclists and pedestrians.

A sobering Transport for London report on London's cycling potential found that anxiety about being in a collision with a motor vehicle was the single biggest reason why Londoners don't make far more journeys by pedal-power. The same report found that the significant growth in cycle travel between 2001 and 2008 was largely caused by existing London cyclists cycling more, rather than by the number of cyclists increasing.

It is ludicrous that thousands of Londoners would happily use bikes, were it not for fear of injury or death. This is supposed to be the best big city in the world.

I would address this insanity by instructing Transport for London to immediately set about redesigning and rethinking the capital's major streets, junctions and roundabouts in line with the approach used in the Netherlands.

Where possible, there would be segregated lanes for cyclists and separate underpasses at junctions and roundabouts. Where streets are too narrow or such changes impractical, motor traffic speed limits should be set at 20mph, and cyclists given priority by means of traffic signal filters or right of way. Many more cycling parking facilities would be installed close to tube and rail stations and transport hubs. To encourage commuters to cycle as part of their daily journeys, I would ensure that these were monitored by staff to prevent theft.

The existing radial cycle superhighways would be adapted in accordance with Dutch

standards. The future of London's cycle hire scheme will be reviewed, to ensure that it represents value for money in terms of encouraging cycling London-wide. If it is found that public money could achieve that goal by being spent in a different way, no further TfL resources will be committed to the cycle hire scheme. I would, though, welcome interest from commercial sponsors interested in augmenting it from their own pockets.

London's roads would also be enhanced by a much firmer application of traffic rules. The police will be required to ensure that cycle and bus lanes are not occupied or blocked by parked or moving motor vehicles. The rules of London's road must be better observed by all road-users - cyclists included.

My road management policies would not all be about rationing and restriction, however. One such plan is the shared space schemes, where different types of road user - motorists, cyclists and pedestrians alike - have equal access and rights to the same stretch of road. It would offer the ideal that lessening regulation nourishes responsible social negotiation. Museum Street is the scene of London's most prominent shared space venture. I would carefully assess its effects and learn from these, should a similar approach seem apt elsewhere.

I want London to become much more of a walking city. In the days before cars, buses and tubes, working Londoners thought nothing of covering the distance between the capital's "villages" on foot. Yet many of London's streets could and should be far more hospitable to pedestrians. Indeed, the argument for pedestrianising central London's main shopping highway Oxford Street should be revisited.

As mayor, I would review any recent removals of pelican crossings in the name of "smoothing traffic flow" with a view to re-installing them, or making still better provision for pedestrians having the temerity to want to cross a road.

The Legible London way-finding scheme should be enlarged and unified and there should be far more signposts showing visitors how quickly they can walk from a tube or railway station to their destination, rather than catching a bus or cab. As far as possible, walking should be the interchange option of choice. It is also perhaps the best way to appreciate London itself. Walking deserves to become a top transport priority.

Public transport

London's public transport service is a magnificent thing, a great spaghetti bowl feeding the urban landscape. It's a shame we moan about it constantly. It's a shame that we are sometimes justified.

My mayoralty's transport revolution would ease the worst of the moans away. I would reduce fares across the board by 5.6% at the earliest juncture, wiping away this year's latest increase, and maintain them at that level in 2013. Thereafter, I would increase them by no more than 1% above the rate of inflation, and by less if possible, depending on the circumstances. In keeping with my congestion charge structure, I would set lower "early-bird" fares to help those who work unsocial hours and encourage more staggered commuting.

I would also bring in a one-hour bus pass, enabling passengers to change buses an unlimited number of times within a 60-minute period. Fares need simplifying too. I would look into reducing the number of zones to as few as three, and placing a flat-rate ceiling on the price of an annual travelcard. This would be particularly attractive to outer Londoners, where incentives to lessen car use need to be greatest.

Our public transport is the most expensive of any large city. Its performance is undermined by road congestion and years of under-investment. Though eager to push cycling and walking up the transport agenda and foster more working closer to home, I still want to encourage more public transport use. Most importantly, I want Londoners and visitors to enjoy using it more.

Let's consider the bus service first. The concerns of bus-users, many of them London's least well-paid, are the soaring level of fares and the slow speed of journeys. My road-pricing scheme would improve life for bus passengers, the roads would be clearer and the journeys swifter and smoother. This would add to the bus service's attractions, which would produce more revenue, which, together with the yield from road pricing, would mitigate the effects on TfL finances of fares being reduced and enable capacity to expand. In short, the bus service would be cheaper, bigger and better. Sad little rows about the best shape for a bus and whether it should have a back door that stays open while it's moving can be left to juveniles.

London buses should be as kind to the environment as possible, but for now a balance must be struck between the greenness of the fleet and the cost of it. The capital's very poor air quality would benefit from there being more with diesel-electric hybrid engines on our roads, but at present these cost more than half as much as conventional diesel models. The price will, however, fall if larger numbers are introduced. I would urge the bus route operating companies to purchase more of them as soon as possible.

The latest new London bus, a different kind of hybrid that TfL says is more friendly to the environment than its rivals, has barely

emerged from its wrapper. It's being piloted on just one of London's 700 routes.

Should it perform well under high-volume pressure, I would consider more than the eight presently on order being added to London's 8,500-strong fleet, even though their price is 10% higher than that of other hybrids. This too is likely to fall if the new bus proves its worth.

There is also a case for re-introducing articulated "bendy" buses on the longer suburban trunk routes. When used in central London, these exceptionally long vehicles made cyclists nervous and frustrated motorists who wished to overtake them, but were popular with older people, the disabled and those wheeling pushchairs, whose transport needs my mayoralty would respect.

The one characteristic of bendys that a majority disliked was how easy they made it to dodge fares. This was at an unacceptable level, and any bendy return to London's streets would only take place under my mayoralty if said buses were staffed with modern-day conductors to ensure that Oyster cards were swiped.

The London Underground service could be changed for the better too, though in its case the scope is smaller and the issues less clear cut. I would continue pressing government for investment to maintain the necessarily interminable upgrade programme. But looking further ahead, there is a more fundamental decision to be made.

Every so often, politicians dust off the idea of the "driverless" tube train, which they claim will break the power of the tube unions. It is a phantom chariot. London Underground already has trains that are "driverless" in the sense that the Victoria, Central and Jubilee lines have trains which aren't manually controlled by people sitting in cabs at the front end except in an emergency. Trains on the Docklands Light Railway (DLR) don't have drivers even in this way. Instead, they have "train attendants" or "captains" who travel on the train but move around inside it, yet these people too are unionised and have the right to strike.

There are, however, metro systems in the world that do operate without staff being on board the trains. The real question, then, is whether the London Underground should aspire to the same thing.

I would invite Londoners to decide. Do we want a human being staffing every Underground train or do we not? I would hold a referendum - possibly held on the same day as the one about road-pricing - and tailor Transport for London's future investment strategy according to the result.

Any decision to move to unstaffed Underground trains would be extremely costly, take many years and certainly increase

the likelihood of industrial action in the short term, though I would strive to lessen this by managing the transition through negotiation.

Three themes weaving through my public transport policy would be making services more pleasant, more integrated and more self-financing. There are tensions between these themes, which would be resolved on a case-by-case basis. Whatever happened to the level of fare revenues – which might increase substantially if people switched from cars to bus and rail – it would be important for TfL to be as financially self-sufficient as possible.

As mayor, I would ask London's wealthiest businesses to help more with large-scale infrastructure projects. London, not least its taxpayers, have done a great deal for the banking industry recently. It is now time for that industry to do a little more for Londoners.

Funding for Crossrail, which is expected to increase London's rail travel capacity by 10%, provides a model. More than half the project's budget comprises levies raised from businesses and property developers who will benefit from it, and contributions from the owners of Heathrow airport, the City of London Corporation, and the Canary Wharf Group. My City Hall would strive to build on that precedent.

I would look into the idea of TfL taking control of Network Rail's rail routes within the GLA area, and receiving the fares they generate.

I would end distribution of free newspapers on the Underground and at transport hubs. Although these provide TfL with some income, the resultant littering makes riding carriages feel like sitting in a skip and the staff required to clear the discarded papers up could be more usefully employed. Instead, I'd ask TfL to look into leasing more space at stations to coffee shops, independent food stalls and other small retailers – even of high-quality, second-hand goods such as DVDs and books.

As well as being a source of income, these would make stations more attractive. So too would their being properly staffed at night – a basic requirement of a great urban public transport system is that the public using it feel safe.

Fighting poverty

Making London work better means making it less unequal. In recent times, London's incomers both from overseas and other parts of the UK have increasingly been well-qualified and highly aspirational. By contrast, large numbers of people leaving London each year have lower levels of qualification. This underlines the dangers of London's increasing unaffordability.

The capital needs cleaners, waiters and refuse collectors just as it needs managers, business investors and entrepreneurs, which is why as mayor I would continue my predecessors' commitment to persuading London's major employers to pay the London Living Wage.

But London also needs to create more jobs for Londoners who aren't going to be City whizz-kids, science professors or media high flyers, especially among its young unemployed. I would not be a mayor to indulge in vanity projects, but I would permit myself one pet policy.

Armed with my newly integrated regeneration powers, I would endeavour to enable bicycle factories to be established in at least two of London's areas of high unemployment, staffed mostly by people from the immediate neighbourhood.

The bikes would be simple, sturdy yet lightweight and designed with London's burgeoning new cycling infrastructure in mind. They'd be as cheap as possible, their price subsidised if necessary by Transport for London. The London bicycle could become the hallmark of a new London – a London that works better for all.

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Greater London is made up of a patchwork of different places, ranging from outlying towns like Croydon, Uxbridge and Romford to inner urban neighbourhoods whose names resonate with London history, like Stepney, Walworth and Clerkenwell. Each has its different qualities. My role would be to help those areas most in need, and to balance the interests of city as a whole with those of its many and various neighbourhoods.

In order to improve living standards, my prime objectives would be to see less crime, more affordable housing, and a cleaner, calmer environment - areas in which I have strategic powers. My guiding principle would be to blend firm, judicious use of my mayoral influence with a desire to devolve power to organisations at the grassroots. Key to my job will be to recognise when to intervene, and when to let local people decide for themselves.

This approach to enhancing neighbourhood quality of life would complement my programme for modernising the capital's economy, through diversifying and decentralising its industries and transforming its transport systems.

My measures for making London a better place to live would be:

- Doing all I can to lessen unaffordability, overcrowding, rogue landlordism and every other aspect of London's housing crisis.
- Requiring the Metropolitan police to give a larger share of resources to policing at local level, and respond better to the wishes of local communities.
- Working with London's boroughs to devolve more control over local development and environmental issues to community councils and other neighbourhood groups.
- Publicly supporting a massive campaign of effective action against territorial youth violence.

Rethinking housing

Earlier in this manifesto I described the untapped potential of affordable house building which could invigorate London's economy and reduce unemployment. Let me now turn to other aspects of the capital's profoundly damaging housing crisis.

The average price of a London home has more than doubled in the past 12 years to more than £400,000.

As these figures have soared, so has demand for accommodation in the private rented sector, where rents in turn have risen frighteningly. A two-bedroom house in most of London's boroughs devours more than 50%

of a household's earnings and nowhere is the amount less than 40% - greater than anywhere else in England.

This picture becomes still more alarming with larger houses. Even an archetypal family unit of mum, dad, daughter and son is handing over three-quarters of its income in rent, even in parts of the capital that aren't considered upmarket.

Meanwhile, the numbers of households on London boroughs' waiting lists for social housing has rocketed to 360,000, while the government's reforms to housing and other benefits are forcing tens of thousands of households, including children and disabled people, to move into single rooms in shared houses, to smaller homes locally, to cheaper parts of London far from friends and schools - or even out of the capital altogether.

Neither London's accommodation market nor its subsidised supply are delivering what's required for a large and increasing number of Londoners. With government funding shrinking and a further wave of council house sell-offs proposed, it is increasingly the case that central London in particular is becoming affordable only to the very rich and the very dependent poor.

The need for a major housing rethink in London is underlined by the conditions many London households live in. Between 200,000 and 650,000 out of a total of about 3.3m are overcrowded, depending on the definition used.

Almost all overcrowded households are families with children. English Housing Survey statistics have shown that the number of London children under the age of 16 in overcrowded conditions had risen to an average of more than 390,000 in the 2007-2010 period compared with 330,000 during 2005-2008. About 43% of them live in the social rented sector - council or housing association properties - and 25% in homes rented from private landlords.

The entire, calamitous situation has severe consequences for London's quality of life and extracts a heavy price from neighbourhoods where it precipitates family breakdown, ill health, education failure and in some cases crime and antisocial behaviour.

Cutting public spending on affordable housing is a classic example of a false economy.

It erodes London's tradition of mixed-income neighbourhoods - one that has served the capital well.

I would adjust the current London Plan - the mayor's master spatial development document - to increase the targets for affordable housing

and put the strongest possible argument for socially mixed communities. These targets would include quotas for very large affordable family homes. When a household of eight people can move into a space the size it truly requires, it frees-up a space for a household of six currently trapped in a space for four. The benefits of this knock-on effect are self-evident. The plan would also emphasise my aspiration that minimum space within all new homes is in line with Parker Morris standards.

I would argue that London should follow the example of the Welsh Assembly and introduce new, upper rate council tax bands. The extra money raised should be ringfenced to finance more homes for social rent.

I would beg, badger and browbeat London boroughs to save every brick of existing social housing, even if its condition is not perfect.

I would urge residents in estates all over London to do everything in their power to save their homes from demolition, and I would intervene to stop boroughs from approving planning applications that contain too few affordable homes. I would not hesitate to step in when the objective seems to be to attract rich investors at the expense of poorer residents.

My approach to the “intermediate” part of the “affordable” spectrum, which includes helping people to own a share of a property and thereby get a toe on the housing ladder, would be to target low-income households, rather than those of £70,000 or more.

I would explore ways of making rapid use of isolated sites, or small parcels of land that lack the scale to interest developers, and are therefore going to waste. It should be possible for the mayor to compulsorily purchase such sites, push through planning permissions and sell them at auction to individuals or small groups who want build homes.

As mayor I would also promote the idea of licensed squatting in buildings abandoned by their owners. In the late 1970s responsible alliances of squatters, often young people with high ideals and little money, formed housing co-operatives which boroughs allowed to administer and maintain empty properties, preventing their decay and enabling people on low-incomes to live in them cheaply.

With increasing numbers of Londoners – including more than 200,000 families with children – housed in the private rented homes, it is essential that the mayor helps to improve this sector to the mutual benefit of tenants and good landlords. My Homes for London directorate would take on this role.

There is cross-party and housing charity support for a London-wide not-for-profit lettings agency that will protect renters

from sharp practice and help broker longer tenancy agreements, giving landlords long-term confidence in their income streams and tenants more security. Rent increases could be linked to a housing price or inflation index.

Homes for London would also contain a team that worked with police to target rogue landlords.

All of these would help. But the big solutions to London’s housing crisis lie with central government, which should be investing billions more in high-quality homes for sale or rent at well below market rates. Not only would this be an economic investment with economic gains, it would help London become a better place to live for millions of its citizens.

As mayor I would never cease making this argument, because the future of London depends on winning it.

Responsive policing

London’s mayor has lately assumed more direct control over Metropolitan Police Service strategy. Through his office for policing and crime – the MOPC – the mayor also holds the Met commissioner to account on behalf of Londoners. In turn, Londoners hold the mayor to account at the ballot box for the performance of the police.

The top strategic objective that I would set for the Met would be to make policing in London more trusted, more effective and far more attuned to the different needs of different localities.

I would require the Met commissioner to move the service away from centralised, paramilitary-style policing and towards the more productive traditions of local emergency response and neighbourhood policing by consent. This would entail a reduction in the number of officers assigned to specialist units, and their redeployment to core, borough-based duties.

It is unacceptable that 700 territorial support group (TSG) officers spend most of their days waiting for riots to take place while the public complains that 999 calls go unheeded. When TSG officers are deployed to specific localities, such as to conduct stop-and-search operations, they frequently create needless hostility towards the Met as a whole. In some places it is known as “the thick and stupid group”. We need brave officers with special skills to be available and to do their work well when required, but we do not need a reserve “riot squad” doing inappropriate work badly.

One of the sobering truths revealed by last summer’s riots is that cynicism about the Met is deeply ingrained. The honesty of officers is doubted, their attitude resented, their reputation poor.

It is mendacious of politicians to claim that only criminals express such views, and to dismiss them accordingly. In fact, these opinions are widely held among the sorts of Londoners – poor, working-class, often of particular ethnicities – who are most frequently the victims of crime.

I would end the use of stop-and-search, except at specified public events, and when there is clear intelligence to show a violent incident is likely to take place.

There is no evidence proving that random, large-scale stop-and-search reduces violent crime and a great deal to show that it creates deep dislike of the police. Because of stop-and-search it is commonplace to hear law-abiding young people in high-crime areas liken the Met to an enemy gang. An independent panel set up by the government in the aftermath of the riots identified stop-and-search as a possible “motivation factor” for black and Asian rioters. Could there be a more counterproductive use of police energy and time?

With the relationship between the police and the media currently under intense scrutiny, I would make clear to the commissioner that the job of the police is to prevent and detect crime, not wine and dine journalists, to tell the truth to the public rather than conceal it, and to uphold the law rather than break it.

I would insist that the Met implement the recommendations of the inquiry by the now defunct Metropolitan Police Authority into the lack of career progress of officers from religious and ethnic minorities, to ensure that all officers are promoted on merit and no other grounds.

Publicly, I would ask for a number of improvements: better investigation of rape allegations, increased resources put into enforcing road laws and the end of the use of kettling at public demonstrations, as this now causes more trouble than it solves.

Privately, I would ask the commissioner (and others) if the Met would be more effective if the police service’s national and metropolitan responsibilities were separated, and if the City of London’s separate service was done away with. I would then press central government to act on my findings.

I would ask the MOPC to consult widely about the best way to protect women (and also men) who make their living as sex workers from harm, concentrating on the issue of whether it is better to liberalise the law or to criminalise the purchasers of the services. I would also make a loud case for following the successful example of Portugal in decriminalising all illegal drug use, a measure that would do more to reduce crime than any other I can think of.

To assist the Met in delivering local solutions to local concerns, I would consider gifting a significant portion of the police budget to London’s boroughs for spending on crime reduction and community safety. The local police would have to bid against – or ideally in partnership with – community groups, tenant associations, youth services or probation teams with their own schemes for dealing with crime.

This policy would focus police minds on local concerns and give local communities a much stronger voice in how London is policed.

It might also improve local recruitment. We’ll know the Met has got its act together when a police career is seen by all Londoners as a noble calling.

Community power

The terms “localism” and the “big society” have become political buzzwords that are varied in their meaning, or even devoid of one. However, what is clear is that it is difficult for a population of London’s size and turnover to maintain a sense of common purpose and a commitment to improving its neighbourhoods.

To this end, I would strongly support the further empowerment of tenants and residents associations, ward policing panels and other community forums. London will soon discover if its first community council is to be founded, the urban equivalent of a parish council. The decision will be taken by Westminster City council in what campaigners rightly claim is a test of its commitment to local communities. I would strongly support community council campaigns across the capital.

I would also encourage London to explore the idea of Community Improvement Districts (CIDs). These would be similar to already-existing Business Improvement Districts, where businesses in a particular area agree to pay an additional rate for a limited period, to allow spending on improving the immediate area for their benefit and everyone else’s. CIDs would give a vote to local people on particular changes or improvements, and councils would have to match the money raised from their core budgets.

Youth violence

London A-Z street maps show its trunk roads and avenues, its stations, reservoirs and parks. But it offers no clues to the alternative cartography that shapes the lives of more and more Londoners – the invisible dividing lines that engender violent local feuds. Territories have been defined, and the borders between them guarded and sometimes breached. Chasings, beatings, stabbings and shootings have become almost commonplace.

Many who live in such areas are barely

touched by this alternative world. They and it are largely invisible to each other. Yet an awareness of that other side of neighbourhood life filters down even to primary school children.

Young people in particular, are acutely conscious of it. At worst, they are cowed, menaced and controlled by it. Families who are affected daily become desperate to move. Others have become shockingly conscious of it when fights and feuds have burst into daily routines in broad daylight.

The term “gang culture” over-estimates the degree of organisation involved in this activity. A more accurate description would be teenagers engaged in parochial feuding, which sometimes overlaps with drug dealing, robbery or weapon-handling on behalf of adult criminals.

This situation is intolerable and can not be solved by the police alone. A recent review of UK and international initiatives to lessen gun and knife use among the young concluded that “zero tolerance” approaches to the carrying of weapons have at best only a short-term effect, and tend to institutionalise a hostile relationship with the law.

The review also found that, in the United States, it was far more effective to employ locally based strategies, where a variety of agencies worked together to combine prevention and suppression approaches.

A successful strategy would have good police work at its heart, but it would not be led by the police. I would require the Met commissioner to make reducing localised serious youth violence a top priority, and to set about that task in close partnership with youth workers, schools and local authorities on the ground.

The Met should go about its normal business in targeting the older career criminals who recruit teenagers to do their dirty work. But we will get nowhere with those teenagers by simply using displays of police force and a few bits of poorly funded social work. In order to have an impact, we need focused, customised partnership work offering the perpetrators of unacceptable behaviour a real prospect of leading a different kind of life with a genuine fear of prosecution.

As mayor, there would be three parts to my role in this desperately urgent task.

- To fully and publicly acknowledge the scale of the problem and the need to solve it. I would hold a London-wide conference of youth work practitioners, community development workers, schoolteachers and police and expect representatives from every borough to attend. From this event I would compile a comprehensive

local knowledge base, including where the necessary borough-level funding and organisation was lacking.

- To appoint a leading academic in this field to ensure that the principles behind tackling serious youth violence were clearly understood and shared with those in areas where the problem is new or thriving. Furthermore, there is a view that not enough good quality research has been done into why some become involved with violent sub-cultures, and others do not. I would consider funding further work in this area.
- To demand that the bespoke, localised partnership projects we need are properly funded over at least an eight-year period. Much good work in trying to reach teenagers who are receptive to being diverted from a destructive lifestyle is wasted, as the funding runs out just when it is starting to be effective. If necessary, I would increase my share of council tax and hand it back to boroughs or established community groups to sustain them in the long term.

There can be no half measures on this issue: no looking away, no “tough talk” bluster, no covering up failure with meaningless statistics about knives taken off the streets. London looks askance at the south side of Los Angeles, where rival gangs have become the local establishment, or the poor, burning suburbs of Paris. Those cities’ problems are greater than ours. But we are heading in their direction, and no effort must be spared in turning London back from that path.

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London thrives on freedom, including the freedom of people to be who they want to be. However, the mayor has a duty to cultivate among the populace a respect for others, and a shared sense of affiliation and responsibility for the city.

What is the best way for a London mayor to strengthen Londoners' sense that they belong to London, and London to them?

I believe London's historically diverse population continues to be an asset and envied around the world - and particularly when different elements of it engage and overlap. In different parts of the metropolis different social mixes occur for a whole range of reasons: gentrification, aspiration, regeneration, economic change, birth and death rates, inward and outward migration.

My complementary policies for making London work better, and be a better place to live, will help sustain that diversity. My policies for culture and equality would aim to have the same beneficial effects.

I would encourage a shared sense of community in London by:

- Defending and broadening London's record of success as a diverse city that cares about fair play, equality and individuality
- Re-energising London's great cultural events and public spaces
- Creating more opportunities for independent creative endeavour, especially in expensive central London areas
- Encouraging Londoners to embrace and understand their city's heritage and overlapping histories.

Fair play

Thirty years ago the leader of the Greater London Council, the London-wide democratic governance body of the time, was widely mocked for giving grants to gay rights organisations, backing women's groups and supporting anti-racism campaigns. Today, no political leader of London would ridicule the idea that discrimination on the grounds of race, sex or sexuality are evils that should be opposed. Similarly, he or she would always endorse the view that London is a place where people can, if they wish, escape the life they were born into and become who it is they want to be.

These are liberal, egalitarian causes that unite respectable political opinion. The consensus built around these themes is a great London achievement and is one I would strongly defend. But as mayor I would also attempt to broaden London's traditions of equality, individuality and fair play. This

would begin with a clear declaration that the goal of inclusiveness embraces all who might find themselves unjustly held back in life by the prejudices or preconceptions of others, including on grounds of age, faith, disability and social class.

It would continue with the assertion that two of the most destructive forces of unfair hardship in London will receive far greater attention from the mayoralty than before - health inequality and child poverty.

The life expectancy of a man born in the Tottenham Green ward in Haringey is 71 years and that of a counterpart born in Kensington and Chelsea's Queen's Gate ward is 88 years - a bleak and astonishing difference. We also know that a journey east on the Jubilee line is brings with it lower male longevity at each stop: men in Canning Town will live on average five years less than those in Westminster, just eight stations away. These facts speak powerfully in favour of the mayor being handed control of the National Health Service in London, enabling it to cater for London's specific geographical and social needs.

London's child poverty figures are notorious, with more than 600,000 youngsters falling into that category - that's 39%, the highest proportion in the UK. In one of the richest cities in the world, an entire generation is going through childhood burdened with severe disadvantages, which only a minority grow up to overcome.

A system that provides so little freedom for the mayor to raise their own funds means City Hall can do little to tackle this distressing situation in the short term. But mayors can pick and choose which subjects outside their brief they can seek to make a national issue of. For me, it would be child poverty. In the anniversary year of the birth of Charles Dickens, who documented the lives of London's Victorian have-nots so powerfully, what better time for a London mayor to speak out for the young London have-nots of today?

Cultural events

It is part of the mayor's job to help Londoners and the city's visitors have a good time. Doctor Johnson famously declared that to be tired of London was to be tired of life. Part of my mission as mayor would be to banish any sign of such fatigue.

This would continue the work of my predecessors, notably in respect of Trafalgar Square. During the lifetime of the mayoralty this has been transformed from the inaccessible centre of an unfriendly roundabout into the communal focal point it was always meant to be.

City Hall has revitalised the life of the square

since becoming its manager at the start of the century. However, this has lately been diluted by the incursion of commercial interests and mayoral parsimony into decisions about the events Trafalgar Square hosts.

As mayor, I would have no objection to suitable corporate sponsors supporting cultural activity of any kind, provided they do not dominate or dictate the character of it. I would also hope that the events I backed were beneficial to London's tourism industry.

However, my mayoralty would take the view that high-quality, inclusive cultural events are invaluable in themselves. I would therefore ensure that my budgets for these events were generous.

I would provide more help for St Patrick's Day, St George's Day, Pride, Black History, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Latin American festivals to name but some. I would also continue to back the Trafalgar Square Fourth Plinth contemporary art project, including its excellent schools award.

Beyond activities in Trafalgar Square, I would continue to support events as popular and varied as the annual Thames Festival and the Gunnersbury Park Mela in Ealing, but also look into helping secure the future of the Notting Hill Carnival, which for too long has struggled financially and depended on the heroic efforts of a few dedicated volunteers. This is one of London's great celebrations and it must not be allowed to fade away from neglect.

A flagship policy would be filling the gaping gap in London's cultural calendar where a great popular music festival ought to be. This would not be a revival of the Rise anti-racism concert, though it would have a lot in common with it.

It is absurd that a city that has produced such an array of ground-breaking musicians and performers does not make a mighty song and dance about it. The objective would be to compile line-ups of acts from London, or formed there, reflecting the city's multicultural personality.

The event might be free, or else charged for, with the takings going to London-based charitable causes. It would take place in one of London's large public parks and become a great annual event. Its name would be London United.

The beauty of large, mayoralty-backed public events is that they provide an opportunity for different strands of London culture to meet and mix, to their common advantage. The same principle would inform my attitude to all London's parks, squares and cultural institutions.

Strong feelings are aroused by too much commercial and antisocial use of public parks. I share the view that these should fundamentally be places of escape and tranquility, used only sparingly as entertainment or sporting venues. Last year, the mayor was given some control over the capital's eight royal parks, promising that Londoners' views on their use would be better taken into account. This was a good innovation, and I would actively canvas the views of Londoners, especially the young. Supporting these parks includes ensuring that new generations value them, enjoy them and have some spiritual sense of owning them.

I would look again at abandoned plans for redesigning Parliament Square, which should be every bit as accessible to pedestrians as Trafalgar Square, as well as far more friendly to cyclists. Critics of that plan damned it as unadventurous. Mine would be nothing of the kind.

Another contribution that London's big businesses could make would be sponsoring an official "Londoner" culture card for under 18s, providing discounted access on selected theatre and exhibition tickets. Finally, I would take a righteous stand against any suggestion from the powers in Westminster that free entrance to London's mighty galleries and museums might end. Any such stance would be treated as tantamount to treason.

Independent culture

The London of the 1960s to 1980s contained a vast network of indoor venues where all forms of small-scale cultural activity took place. Little nightclubs, pubs, galleries and hidden basements were dotted around the place, largely invisible to the mainstream of London life. These were often highly successful, particularly in central London. They nurtured an array of youthful and innovative talent and provided a great deal of fun.

This strand of London's cultural life has been in retreat for a long time as rents have risen and developers moved in. The centre of town is now practically devoid of "unofficial" culture and is instead dominated by the large-scale mainstream culture, sponsored by corporations and supported by the state. Space for an "unofficial" art and artistry is primarily confined to the disused warehouses in the east end.

This shift represents a loss to a city that prides itself on innovation and a youth culture that has changed the world. I would seek to reverse that loss by offering up-and-coming cultural entrepreneurs support as small enterprises, through incentives to businesses, in partnerships with cultural institutions, and by way of my planning policies.

Just as small technology start-ups and others are served by "incubators", offering advice on

finance, property, administration and bidding for contracts, I would help create a culture incubator, perhaps in conjunction with arts or music college. Mainstream businesses could be encouraged to create small venues in vacant parts of their premises.

London's culture is immensely attractive, but it needs to remain as diverse and individual as the city's people and neighbourhoods. For the mayor to be linked too closely with London's independent culture would undermine the point of its existence, but helping to create the conditions for it to thrive in all parts of the city, can only do London good.

As mayor I would also assist with the evolution of London's independent news media. The capital has, for decades, needed more variety and competition with its sole regional newspaper, whose traditional interests are the glamorous centre, the commuter belt and nothing in-between. The best London blogs and websites collectively provide a welcome respite from this dull diet and I would be as available to them as to the mainstream outlets.

Loving London

Londoners' sense of belonging in the city and of it belonging to them derives significantly from their relationship with its history. The more Londoners learning about and debating London's history, the better. To that end I would champion both the protection of London's heritage and the elevation of its historical debates. I believe we must preserve as much as we can of London's significant palpable past and declare certain spaces utterly sacred.

At the top of my hands-off list is the river Thames and its banks. I would support the building of the proposed new "super sewer" because to tolerate intermittent, large influxes of human faeces into London's main artery is unnatural. I would also emit a vigilante snarl at any suggestion by any London local authority that it adds to the high-rise, low-occupancy, poor-taste architectural excrescences such as disfigure the water's edge near Wandsworth bridge. The river is ours, not theirs. They shall not pass.

My elevation of the debate about London and its history would take two forms. One would be a call to all London's libraries, museums and any other source, to pool online the written or recorded testimonies of ordinary Londoners about their lives in the capital, and so gather in one place one of the greatest oral history collections in the world.

My other initiative would be to see commissioned from a noted children's author a fully inclusive, one-volume, narrative-led Story of London, with a view to its becoming

a must-read item in every classroom of every London school. And if no suitable author wants to take on the task, I'll just have to write it myself.

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This manifesto envisages the recasting of London as a model megacity, combining the best of its historic and contemporary strengths with the changes it must make if it is to thrive in the future.

The model megacity cannot be built by a model mayor alone, but the pulling together of politicians, small and large businesses, the public and voluntary sectors and, crucially, London's 7.75 million citizens. I hope the collection of ideas assembled here signals what could be achieved if a critical mass of these interested parties all worked towards the common goals of making London work better, more harmonious and an equitable place to live. The vision I've presented is idealistic but not utopian, ambitious but doable. It blends the best ideas from across the political spectrum. It speaks to a potential consensus, albeit an elusive one.

As mayor I would aim to consolidate that consensus and draw on its power to push change through. Not everyone would subscribe to it, and not everyone would benefit from it. But those who will lose out, or believe they will, might find some solace in accepting that it resulted from the democratic will.

Two possibly divisive elements of my programme - an expansion of road-pricing and a move towards unstaffed Underground trains - would only go ahead if they received "yes" votes in referendums. These would validate the policies with a double mandate - one from the mayoral election, the other from those single issue votes.

My commitment to democracy would be reflected in the conduct of my mayoral administration and the way it took decisions. I have already pledged to hold regular weekly press conferences, the majority to be held at locations spread around the city. I further undertake to ensure that all written questions from London Assembly members receive proper answers by no later than the Monday following the preceding Wednesday's mayor's question time, unless I can provide a very good reason.

To make London's mayor more truly accountable would first mean making the institution more powerful. There are arguments for using the new Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime as a template for bringing further core responsibilities fully in-house, and creating a form of London cabinet government. I have already explained why I believe the London mayor should enjoy local tax-raising powers comparable with those of the mayor of New York and, arguably, be in charge of London's health service. Some believe the mayor should be in charge of education too.

But those conversations are for another day. For now, I can only thank you for reading this manifesto and humbly hope that the vision it sets out for London is one that you, fellow Londoner, feel that you can share.

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Contributors to the collective effort of assembling this manifesto include Shelter, the Centre for London, the London Civic Forum, London Child Poverty Action, the Trust for London, the Campaign for Clean Air in London, London TravelWatch, Sustrans, London First, London Citizens, the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the London Cycling Campaign, Eco-Logica, the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, various politicians, a number of London School of Economics academics, several London assembly reports and mayoral strategy documents, and several hundred Comment is free readers whose names and pseudonyms cannot be listed here because there are so many of them. But I know who we are.